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A PEACETIME MILITARY STRATEGY FOR LATIN AMERICA

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It seems clear that the world is evolving into one characterized by a new and more competitive multipolar international order. We are likely to see a return to the concept of zones of relative influence as no one nation can expect to enjoy in the twenty-first century the monopoly of power held by the United States for much of the twentieth. Explosive population growth and rapid technological advance ensure that competition for the world's limited natural and financial resources -- as well as markets for the production into which those resources are transformed -- will become ever more acute. The United States and Canada, the European Community, and Japan, the three major economic power centers of the next decade and beyond, may find themselves increasingly intertwined in a three-way struggle for economic, political, and perhaps even military advantage. Continued instability to be sown by a militarily powerful but economically and politically weakened Soviet Union on the one hand, and by developing countries frustrated by poverty or regional rivalries on the other, will complicate the security picture.

In such circumstances, international relations will once again be at least partially characterized by even sharper geographic zones of

influence. It is almost inevitable that Latin America and the Caribbean would continue to fall within the U.S. zone, but we must nevertheless be prepared to consolidate our historical primacy in this hemisphere to ensure that our long-term political and economic interests are not undercut in an increasingly competitive, multipolar world.

What must we do if we want to be *primus inter pares* in Latin America? What are our overriding interests there, and how are they to be protected and advanced? First and foremost, we want a stable Latin America, free from aggression whether it be from within or without the region. Only in the context of Latin American stability can our varied national economic and social interests remain secure; we cannot allow any of the countries in the region to be used as a platform for strategic attack against our territory. Furthermore, stability in the hemisphere is necessary if we are to maintain our most critical sea lanes of communication -- the Panama Canal, and trans-Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico routes. Stability and growing prosperity in Latin America and the Caribbean will also help to assure us of a permanent supply of key natural resources and keep open lucrative markets for our own production. Latin American stability and prosperity will also attenuate the problem of massive illegal immigration which is increasingly threatening the social and cultural fabric of our nation, and of uncontrolled production and processing of narcotics which is undermining their societies. Last, several of the countries of Latin

America -- Brazil and Mexico are the best examples -- will have much more power in the early part of the next century than they do today, and proximity and historical ties indicate that we should do everything within our power to maintain close and friendly relations.

POLITICAL OBJECTIVES

What political objectives will further our overarching hemispheric goals of stability and prosperity? In the years immediately ahead, several tasks face us in Latin America. In order to foster the stability of Latin America, our first objective must be to ensure that Latin societies remain focussed on consolidating and then building upon recent democratic gains. For the first time in generations, almost all the countries of the region are working democracies; Latin America's formerly disfranchised and restive poor now have a say in government affairs -- affairs so long dominated by the aristocracy and the armed forces. We should back the trend towards democracy in Latin America, not only because it reflects our deepest values, but because universal participation in government provides the greatest disincentive against revolution, interregional hostilities, and the continued political marginalization of Latin America's still impoverished masses.

Obviously, political benefits alone will not keep these

impoverished societies stable. Strengthening democracy and democratic institutions will depend on rising levels of income and prosperity; lack of such growth has already begun to undermine the stability of several of these fragile democratic governments. Advancing economic development, our second objective, remains a major challenge. Growth will also promote our own trade and financial interests, and the sorts of economic ties which have made Latin America an "American preserve" will continue to serve our national security interests as well. A region which is able to create sufficient jobs for its burgeoning population will send fewer illegal immigrants to the United States and turn away from narcotics production as a means of livelihood.

Our third political objective is promoting and then maintaining peace in the region. The erosion of U.S.-Soviet bipolarity could permit and even encourage an upsurge in destructive regional conflicts, made even more dangerous by the proliferation of advanced weaponry in the Third World. Interregional conflicts compromise our national security and damage our investment and other interests in the countries involved. As we are the dominant military power in the region, we will tend to become involved diplomatically or militarily. On the other hand, our dominant position can be a major constructive force in reconciliation.

The fourth and last important political objective is to rid the region of the scourge of drugs. International narcotics production

and trafficking are threats to the stability and the social fabric of all the nations of the hemisphere. We will need to develop and implement a comprehensive anti-narcotics strategy which balances demand reduction, enforcement, and military action and military-to-military cooperation and training with economic assistance in the Latin -- and particularly the Andean -- region.

At present, we can expect that the legitimate governments and most of the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean generally share our primary political objectives. Latins are very sensitive to signs of United States hegemony in the region, however, and it is clear that narcotics traffickers and several resilient Marxist-Leninist or Maoist insurgent groups -- who by and large seem to be unaffected by recent developments in Eastern Europe -- will find both our political and military objectives and strategies a threat to their continued existence. Western European and Japanese traders, investors, and government business interests will also obviously attempt to erode our traditional hemispheric predominance. Domestic fiscal restraints and important competing interests in other parts of the world will also diminish the results of any renewed effort to address the problems of the countries neighboring us of the South.

MILITARY OBJECTIVES

For the past 170 years, relations between the United States and the nations of Latin America and the Caribbean have been characterized by a patron-client relationship. Since the early 1800s, the United States has guaranteed hemispheric defense in cases of aggression from outside the region. As outside interference was limited until the late 1950s, the United States basically enjoyed *carte blanche* in Latin America. It is therefore not surprising that our Latin American strategy has often been dominated by unilateral military considerations even in times of peace. Long periods of inattention to the area have been repeatedly followed by brief, intense episodes of American involvement, often military, when Washington perceived its broader interests to be compromised. Nicaragua in the 1930s, Guatemala in the 50s, Cuba and the Dominican Republic in the 60s, Grenada in 1983, Panama in 1989, and the new war on drugs are parts of a recurring pattern. We have been allowed a free rein in Latin America either because over the past 200 years Latin American military leaders saw our interests as coinciding with theirs -- or because they simply acquiesced to our interventions.

In all Latin American countries but one -- Costa Rica is the sole exception -- the Armed Forces have played a disproportionate role in history, society, and government. Many Latin countries have had longer periods of military rule than government by civilians. In most countries, the Armed Forces provide community services and are heavily

involved in institution-building functions and development activities. In all countries, the military provides large segments of the population with an opportunity for education and self improvement. Any American strategy for protecting United States interests in Latin America in peacetime must perforce have a large military component.

The predominant position of the Armed Forces in Latin America has made close cooperation between the United States and Latin military leaders and establishments perhaps our most critical military objective. It has doubtless proved and will continue to be the most cost-effective piece of the strategy to safeguard our national interests and position in the region. International Military Education and Training (IMET) programs, other military-to-military exchanges, and rounds of meetings in the regional political framework have cemented relationships between senior United States and Latin officers, exposing the future military leaders of the hemisphere to our values with respect to the appropriate role of the military in democratic countries. In many countries, the military leadership also often moves on to assume positions of political importance. Training received and shared views serve to strengthen democracy in the hemisphere: military establishments which are committed to upholding the constitutional process in their countries become firmer in their resolve to do so, while armed forces prone to coups d'état will come to realize that stability and orderly transfer of power are necessary if their societies are to emerge from poverty.

Closely related to the first military objective is the second -- strengthening the capabilities of Latin America's armed forces to defend themselves against internally-generated threats. Externally-generated threats should best be met by the United States, when appropriate and in our wider interests, as defense guarantor for the hemisphere. Our security assistance programs are the key vehicle for providing equipment and materiel to governments faced with insurgency. In that regard, programs enhance both internal and regional stability and build confidence. They also help meet the collateral objective of a more prosperous Latin America, in that they often free up local resources for economic development programs that otherwise would have gone unfunded.

Because of our own national security interests and our commitments to peace and the security of other countries in the hemisphere, a third military objective must be to maintain the forward presence of United States military forces and reinforce these forward-deployed assets by force projection from the United States itself to neighboring areas where we have no direct military presence. This must involve the maintenance of a network of bases, facilities, and logistics arrangements in Panama, the Caribbean, and elsewhere, enhanced by the operational presence of exercises and visits of U.S. military units. These forces will support our military assistance programs, while also guaranteeing rapid military action when necessary. Although we should first support local efforts before

committing U.S. forces, we must nonetheless retain the capability and the will to act unilaterally where vital interests are threatened.

In keeping with our stated political objectives, the fourth military objective is to attack the production of illicit drugs as well as the multinational criminal cartels which enable their processing and distribution. To this end, United States military forces must not only stem the flow of illicit drugs across our Southern borders, but must strengthen the capabilities and the will of military units and paramilitary law enforcement authorities in the nations of Latin America.

CAPABILITIES AND VULNERABILITIES

How can we accomplish our military objectives in a peacetime Latin America? Our security assistance programs are the best initial solution. As stated earlier, the IMET program is the key to the relationship- and influence-building objective. High level visits from the CINC of the United States Southern Command are also useful, as are the relationships built on the basis of exercising. Influence cannot however be built, particularly in resource-poor developing countries, without large amounts of assistance flows. Latin American military leaders will get the equipment they desire or think critical to their needs whether we provide the funding or not. If we DO

provide the funding, however, we have some control over weapons proliferation in the Third World, and at the same time we can ensure that heavy military expenditures do not crowd out civilian expenditures necessary for the economic progress of the country and therefore its stability. Military and security assistance is also one of the most critical keys in meeting the fourth military objective -- fighting the drug war.

Several operational issues must also be addressed. On the drug side, expanded cooperation and coordination must be set up between our military intelligence activities and those of foreign governments and law enforcement organizations if we expect to ensure timely and effective interdiction. Our forward-deployed and backup forces in Latin America must be better structured and equipped to meet the challenges of growing technological sophistication of Third World conflicts, particularly as the application of even small amounts of power early in a crisis usually pays significant dividends. American forces must therefore be capable of dealing with a full range of low intensity threats in the region, including terrorism and narcoinsurgency. Special Forces work well in these environments, but general purpose forces -- which we must retain for global security purposes and to meet a residual but still real Soviet threat -- must also be used in innovative ways to combat potential Latin American instability. A last, but as yet underutilized United States military asset in Latin America is the Navy. Latin American navies, while the

smallest, are also usually the most progressive services in the region. Navy officers are usually far more in tune with American interests and objectives than are officers in the other services. Navy-to-Navy contact exists, but not in an Inter-American sense, as there is no U.S. Southern Fleet. Greater attention should be given to a major naval command, integrated with SOUTHCOM, which could tap the good will and the confidence of Latin American naval commanders. Such a move would serve all our military and political objectives.

Any United States peacetime military strategy towards Latin America will be vulnerable on several fronts. In the first place, many Washington decision makers still see Latin America and the Caribbean as a relatively unimportant backwater. It is doubtful that sufficient civilian and military resources will be available -- especially in peacetime -- to see the strategy to fruitful result. Secondly, large segments of both civilian and military public opinion in Latin America are vehemently opposed to any initiative, action, or proposal that smacks of American hegemony. This will reduce the implementation and the efficacy of our strategy, and will also weaken interregional relationships and stability as some nations line up with us on a particular issue while others just as vehemently decry us. The third and most troublesome vulnerability we face is the depth of bitterness in areas most subject to stress and external interference. Central America is an example, and no amount of American mediation or advisory assistance will resolve the problems of that area until the underlying

social and economic issues are resolved.

CONCLUSION

It seems inconceivable that the United States will have to develop a wartime military strategy for Latin America as a whole. It is just as inconceivable that we will not have to develop and then implement a military strategy for what will probably be repeated but limited interventions in the area in the years and decades to come. If, however, our political objectives for the region are achievable through the peacetime military strategy outlined above, direct United States military interventions may not be so numerous in the future as they have been in the past.